

THE IMPACT OF PASTORAL ATTITUDES
ON
CHURCH GROWTH AND EVANGELISM

A Professional Project

Presented to the Faculty of the
School of Theology at Claremont

In partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree

Doctor of Ministry

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This professional project, completed by

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*has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty
of the School of Theology at Claremont in partial
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ABSTRACT

Recent declines in membership accessions in the mainline Protestant Christian churches raise questions about the reasons for this reality. This paper explores the attitudes of a sample of United Methodist pastors toward the priority which they place upon evangelism and church growth, compared with their priorities 10 and 25 years ago. The thesis tested is that representative pastors invest less time, energy, and leadership in these tasks than in the past, and that this explains the decline in new membership.

The research discovers that pastors feel they personally are working as hard or harder in this field than in the past, but that other ministers are not. The research reveals strong opposition to denominational programs and crusades for membership growth, and also that theological seminaries should provide instruction in evangelism. There is a mixture of attitudes toward church growth among pastors, from a strong commitment to rapid growth to the attitude that growth is irrelevant. There is also a mix of attitudes toward what stimulates church growth. The research project is not conclusive in proving the thesis, but does reveal a tremendous concern for the future viability of a church which is in membership decline. Samples of these attitudes

are included in the paper, as well as Biblical, theological, and historical foundations for emphasis on evangelism.

INTRODUCTION

This study is undertaken because of the author's concern about the declining membership of mainline Protestant Christian churches in recent years. Membership has dropped in the United Methodist church, and more specifically, within the churches of the Pacific and Southwest Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. This is not an isolated phenomenon, and it is one which is of special concern in a geographical area like ours with an increasing population.

Various theories have been proposed to explain why mainline churches have decreased in membership across the past 15-25 years. The purpose of this research project is to explore pastors' self-awareness of the importance and priority they have given to the task of evangelism and church growth, and further, whether this priority has changed over the past 25 years. In addition, pastors are asked to estimate the importance of these tasks in the ministry of their fellow pastors, as well as in the program efforts of the districts and Annual Conference.

This research began with a deep concern on the part of the writer about church decline, and with a suspicion that there is a definite correlation between the reality of church decline in membership and in accessions to membership, and a lower priority given church growth and evangelism by

pastors. Beyond correlation, there might be a cause and effect at work. That is, less concern and less labor and leadership might well result in less outreach and growth.

Obviously it is risky to isolate one factor as the cause for decline. There is no way to prove the above hypothesis scientifically, without having conducted a monitoring and sampling and data-gathering across the past 25 years. Even if this were done, it could be argued reasonably that there have been many other factors at work leading to decline. Yet, if it is possible to get some "feel" as to where pastors are in their perception of the importance of growth and evangelism, then we may be able to treat the subjective factors in a positive way, while recognizing that objective factors of demography, mobility, the impact of alternative life styles and other religious and parareligious movements cannot be controlled or managed.

A tricky part of this consideration is in attempting an assessment of whether attitudes and feelings get carried over into behavior. This paper makes no attempt to investigate this issue, for there seems no practical way to measure this connection. Therefore, let it be clearly understood that here we are researching only the self-awareness of pastors related to their feelings and attitudes about church growth. Performance and effectiveness are issues we do not treat within this project. We are on a subjective and descriptive pursuit.

CHAPTER I

Let us begin with basic motivations for church growth and evangelism. These fundamental driving forces, when rationalized, are our theology. When we propose a working theology for evangelism, we must, as George Sweazey says,

...face the question, 'Does everyone need Jesus Christ?' It could seem possible for Christians to be grateful for their faith without thinking that all others should accept it. There is no doubt that the Bible presents the gospel as God's saving truth for all mankind. Christians throughout history have believed that Jesus Christ came to the earth to give what every human being needs most of all. But is it true? ...Let us think in terms of real people.¹

From the beginning, Christian imperatives for evangelism have rooted in faithfulness to the commands of Christ preserved in Scripture. Especially in the "last appearances" of Jesus are these commands most precise. Matthew 28:19-20: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." And in Mark 16:15, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation." Luke says that "repentance and forgiveness of sin should be preached in his name to all nations." (24:47) And finally, in Acts 1:8, the very last appearance of Jesus, he says, "You shall be

¹George Sweazey, The Church As Evangelist (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 1.

my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

Many New Testament references can be marshalled to illustrate the outreach of the gospel, with an emphasis on "many." Example: throughout the book of Acts, the word "many" describes the joy and triumph of evangelism: many were cleansed of evil spirits, many believed in the Lord, many were baptized, many forsook their trust in magic. (Acts 8:7, 9:42, 17:12, 18:8, 19:18.) Certainly in the earliest recorded life of the church, the imperative was to reach and convert as many as possible. The "good news" required sharing, since it had brought "new life in Christ" to the evangelist. It was a rich and wonderful gift to be offered others.

Sweazey points out a simple but important truth:

Evangelism is not tied to any specialized theology. It is simply a way of communicating whatever conception of Christianity one may have. A Christian church has to have something to say. A church that has nothing to say has no reason to exist.²

While there may be much evangelism based on concepts of Satan as a present enemy, of hell as an endless torment awaiting those who have not specifically "accepted Christ as personal Lord and Savior," of an imminent "second coming" of Christ, there is also much that is based on what

²Ibid., p. 25.

difference Christ can make in a person's life right now. This kind of theology is not related to death issues, but to life issues. There the good news is not insurance or assurance for what lies ahead, but is power for grappling with the realities of life here and now. This theology for evangelism relates to personal experience, rather than speculation about God's acts in the future. The motivation comes from first-hand experience.

The letter of Paul to the Ephesians (5:30) uses the beautiful picture of Christ's church as "...his body, of which we are living parts." This figure communicates the conviction that believers are called to incarnate the life-giving ministry which Christ embodied in Palestine. It is obvious that the body grows in strength as more members are added to it. Again referring to Sweazey's insight:

The members are in the world to do what Jesus would be doing if he were present in the flesh where they are, walking where they walk, meeting those they meet. They should comfort where he would comfort, say what he would say, condemn what he would condemn. The Church wants more members because it wants to have Christ present on as many scenes as possible. It wants him to be in more banks and schools and filling stations. It wants more members who look to Christ as Lord to be writing the editorials, turning the levers in the voting booths, taking part in the discussions at the women's clubs. If evangelism is designed to enlarge an institution, a larger institution is all that it will get. But if it is designed to put into the world more committed followers of Christ, it will be doing what the world most desperately needs.³

³Ibid., p. 15-16.

Methodism was born in a climate of evangelistic fervor. The Wesleys and their associates were burdened to carry the good word of new life in Christ to the unreached masses. Across 200 years the Wesleyan movement has continued the mission of proclamation, winning of converts to Christ, nurturing of disciples into effective Christian witness, and the sponsorship of Christian social action to address the critical issues of the day. As with any movement, the relative emphasis on these objectives has varied with time and place, but none have been considered irrelevant or unnecessary.

The 1976 United Methodist Book of Discipline states

The Church is a community of all true believers under the Lordship of Christ... Under the discipline of the Holy Spirit the Church seeks to provide for the maintenance of worship, the edification of believers, and the redemption of the world... The Church of Jesus Christ exists in and for the world...⁴

In Section IV (The General Ministry of All Christians) the Discipline states:

The people of God are the Church made visible in the world. It is they who must convince the world of the reality of the gospel or leave it unconvinced. There can be no evasion or delegation of this responsibility; the Church is either faithful as a witnessing and serving community, or it loses its vitality and its impact on an unbelieving world.⁵

⁴Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 1976 (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1976), p.19.

⁵Ibid., p. 106.

In paragraph 445 (The Purpose of Ordination) the Discipline focusses on the task of the clergy:

In ordination, the Church affirms and continues the apostolic ministry which it authorizes and authenticates through persons empowered by the Holy Spirit. As such, those who are ordained are committed to becoming conscious representatives of the whole gospel and are responsible for the transmission of that gospel to the end that all the world may be saved.⁶

The above paragraph illustrates the United Methodist Church's priority given the task of proclaiming the evangel, building the church, and transforming society after the mind of Christ. The priority is clearly rooted in Scripture, evidenced by church history, and still seen to be the hope of the world for salvation. Church growth and evangelism is the very life-blood of the Christian movement. It is, finally, what touches "real people" with the love of God expressed in the Salvation-history which the Bible records as both the record and the purpose of the living God.

⁶Ibid., pp. 201-202.

CHAPTER II

To be specific: membership figures in the United Methodist Church showed a decline from slightly over 10,000,000 members in 1954 to 9,731,799 members in 1978. Membership crested in 1964 at 11,054,634. In the Pacific and Southwest Annual Conference for the same period, membership climbed from 162,828 in 1954 to 264,424 in 1969, and has since declined to 196,483 in 1979. These last 10 years represent a percentage loss of 25.7% for the Pacific and Southwest Annual Conference. It should be noted that population has increased significantly in the four states of Arizona, Nevada, Hawaii, and the southern part of California, which make up the Pacific and Southwest Annual Conference.

In addition, during this period, in 1968, the uniting of the Evangelical United Brethren Church and the Methodist Church took place, which meant that there was an influx of membership in the Pacific and Southwest Annual Conference totalling 5,767 members who had formerly been Evangelical United Brethren and were now identified as members of the United Methodist Church.

Contemporary church historians have noted in various ways the rise and decline of membership in Christian churches in recent years. For example, Robert T. Handy notes:

In the decade and a half following the end of hostilities in 1945 a many-faceted revival of religion emerged. It came as a surprise to many, for it reversed the trends of the 1920's. The percentage of church membership in the total population increased from an estimated 50% in 1940 to almost 70% in 1960...⁷

Further:

By the early 1960's it was clear that the period of general revival in North American Christianity was over. As the decade wore on it appeared that an era was coming to an end, yet the shape of the new had not emerged.⁸

The fact is that from the late 1960's through the 1970's there continued a steady decline in membership in the membership of the United Methodist Church, as well as a decline in accessions to membership.

Various attitudes toward this phenomenon were expressed. Sweazey writes:

There is a strange paradox in evangelism. It is the church's most urgent and least pressing duty. Of all the church's tasks, evangelism is the one that can most readily be neglected.⁹

Later he adds, "The first stage in giving up evangelism is to go to a theological seminary; the final stage is to be the pastor of a church." Another attitude is expressed in a quotation from the well-known Presbyterian minister and writer Robert Hudnut. Hudnut writes:

⁷Robert T. Handy, A History of the Churches in the U.S. and Canada (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 396.

⁸Ibid., p. 411

⁹Sweazey, p. 73.

The church in 2000 will be lean. It will be stripped. Already the process has begun. Every year the growth in membership fails to keep pace with the growth of the population. It is the best thing that could happen in the church....the church in 2000 will be stripped of all the people who could not meet the demands. They will fall away just as they did in the first 70's and 80's and 90's.¹⁰

In a searching study, Foster Shannon has analyzed this phenomenon in the Presbyterian church. Howard L. Rice, writing in the introduction, makes this penetrating statement:

At the same time that church officials at every level are aware of the declining membership base, there is little interest in the whole subject of church growth, let alone evangelism. One is led to suspect that for traditional mainline Protestant denominations, the whole subject of confronting the world (especially that part of the world within speaking distance) with the Good News of Jesus Christ is thought of as unseemly or in poor taste. With relatively few exceptions, the whole matter of winning persons for Christ is viewed as something for the "unwashed" sect groups or for those with a particular theological stance and not a matter for the whole church. It is as if we see ourselves as having our own clientele and if others wish to join us we will be decently polite and friendly and give them a chance. Church growth becomes a scapegoat for all the critical fears that success will somehow spoil the purity of the faith. We have come perilously close to an equation of decline with faithfulness.¹¹

Writing in 1961, Gibson Winter expressed an attitude that was popular for a brief time, when all community structures were being reexamined.

¹⁰Robert K. Hudnut, The Sleeping Giant (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 145.

¹¹Foster H. Shannon, The Growth Crisis in the American Church (A Presbyterian Case Study) (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1977), p. xi-xii.

It is naive to think that men with better intentions can change the trend of events, when the best will in the world cannot make a congregation an instrument of ministry in a metropolis. The attempt to perpetuate the local parish or congregation as a basic unit of the Christian church is doomed to failure, although such local units will have to be the building blocks of the new and more adequate form of the church in the metropolis.¹²

Lifting up an ideal for the church of the future, Winter writes:

The staff of Judson Memorial Church (in New York City) say of their ministry in Greenwich Village, 'The chief thing was to be present, to be available, and to know how to speak a sensitive, relevant word when the occasion permitted it.'¹³

Winter seemed to be saying that the function of the church is not to generate new membership, not to evangelize, but to maintain a "ministry of presence."

One of the purposes of this study is to explore whether priorities have changed for representative pastors of United Methodist churches, and whether those changes in priorities have led to more emphasis on a ministry of presence, to a larger emphasis on counseling or small group work, and perhaps to a greater emphasis on social action. If so, it may mean that the traditional emphasis upon evangelism and church growth has necessarily taken a lower priority.

¹²Gibson Winter, The Suburban Captivity of the Churches (New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. 49.

¹³Ibid., p. 141.

During the past several years, Protestant Christians have become increasingly aware of what is called the Church Growth Movement. This has taken many forms. It has sometimes issued from highly successful local congregations where a combination of a charismatic pastor, a well thought-out development program, and a setting that provided large-scale development possibilities has jelled and resulted in very exciting church growth. Many such churches have developed educational programs, using their own experience, to which they have invited pastors of churches seeking the same kind of growth. The Church Growth Movement has also found expression in the Institute For American Church Growth located in Pasadena, California. This institute has researched church growth dynamics, has developed an extensive program to share the insights that have developed and has strongly influenced those churches and pastors where growth is seen as a high priority.

One of the very interesting aspects of study in this area is that the books and articles which have been addressed to the phenomenon of church membership decline have rarely, if ever, isolated the dynamics related to pastoral attitudes. There have been studies of the changing social situation, the rise of new religions, the changing demographics involving the movement of people from place to place which involves cutting loose old ties, and an increasing hesitancy to locate loyalties in new local church

homes. In addition there has been a great deal of study about the attitudes of young adults which are negatively related to institutions of any kind, including the church. Strangely, there has been little if any research or any indepth study of how church leaders, specifically pastors, feel about this phenomenon, and whether they feel that the business of church growth is a top priority in their pastoral calling.

It should be stressed that the author of this paper is not interested in evaluating or criticizing any change of priorities on the part of working pastors. However, since the decline in membership has led to a loss of morale and some loss of confidence in the future strength of the church, it is important to get at why the decline is happening and whether there is, in fact, any way in which caring pastors can reverse the trend.

CHAPTER III

Sweazey quotes the Protestant founder, Martin Luther:

Anyone who is to find Christ must first find the church. For how can one know where Christ is and where faith is unless he knows where his followers are. Whoever wishes to know something about Christ must not trust to himself, nor by the help of his own reason build a bridge to his own heaven, but must go to the church, must visit it and make inquiry. Now the church is not wood and stone, but the company of people who believe in Christ. He must keep in company with them and see how they believe and teach and live.¹⁴

The church which Martin Luther describes is one set in a particular cultural and historic setting and is not totally free to determine its own future in any generation. The last 25 years have seen serious changes in accepted structures, beliefs and value systems in our part of the world. Institutions in educational, religious and other areas have come under serious question. Alternative life styles have developed. Family patterns have changed. Vietnam, women's rights, ethnic minority concerns as well as the ever present threat of atomic and hydrogen bomb disasters have emerged in this period of time. Each of these has taken its toll in people's adherence to institutions which had been very solid for a very long time. Hoge and Roozen begin their 1950-1978 study with these sentences:

An unprecedented period in the life of North American churches began in mid 1960's. For the first time since

¹⁴Quoted in Sweazey, pp. 63-64.

records allow us to recall, many major denominations actually stopped growing in membership and began to decline, and the growth rate of most others slowed considerably. National church attendance also fell off significantly--the declines being felt most sharply among Catholics. The downturn of the 1960's continued into the 1970's. While the latest Gallup Polls hint that the declines may be coming to an end, we still look back over more than a decade of continual abatement. This period of decline which came after nearly two centuries of growth appears especially stark in comparison with a surge of membership and attendance during the so called religious revival of the 1950's.¹⁵

It is fair to say that those churches which seemed to be bulging at the seams 25 years ago faced some real problems in integrating those members into the mainstream life of the church. It was not until some years later that the withdrawal figures began to assume serious proportions in mainline Protestant churches including the United Methodist. Yet Warren Hartman says,

The number of names removed from the church membership rolls has remained relatively constant since the mid-50's. A primary cause for the decline in church membership is the sharp reduction in the number of persons who have been added to the membership of the church.¹⁶

Later he comments on the shift in emphasis which led to this:

A cursory examination of the reports which have been made by Christian education and evangelism agencies reveals that there was a tendency during the 1950's and early 1960's to emphasize broadly defined programs which appealed to large numbers of persons. In recent

¹⁵Dean R. Hoge and David A. Roozen, Understanding Church Growth and Decline, 1950-1978 (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1979), p. 17.

¹⁶Warren J. Hartman, Membership Trends (A Study of Decline and Growth in The United Methodist Church 1949-75) (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1976), p. 3.

quadrennia there has been a tendency to emphasize programs and resources which appeal to smaller numbers of persons. The programs and resources tend to focus on meeting the specialized needs of more sharply defined but relatively small groups of leaders and persons.¹⁷

Some have asserted that we had best help our present church members become faithful Christians before challenging many other people to become a part of the church which has not yet taken on the character of a true Christian fellowship.

Twenty-five years ago there were fewer alternative-style religions. Twenty-five years ago the assumption was that if you were a Protestant Christian you related to one of the existing churches, whether you attended often or not. Within the last 10-15 years a host of alternative communities of faith have emerged--many of them challenging the very character and theology of the existing long-term institutional churches. Particularly here in the southwestern part of the United States such new movements have affected the mainline churches. The range of new opportunities reaches all the way from a pseudo-eastern religion like the Hari Krishnas to tight-knit Christian communal groups like the Children of God, or from the Unification Church to the fundamentalist young adult-oriented Calvary Chapel movement. These groups have certainly incorporated some thousands of young people and others who in another generation would most certainly have shared in the more traditional Protestant Christian

¹⁷Ibid., p. 5.

groups.

In addition, the baby boom following World War II has leveled off and there are more families and single people with no children or very few. This has meant a smaller number of children and youth coming into the church through confirmation classes which grow out of a church school involvement. Figures quoted in chapter four of this paper will reflect this phenomenon, in that receptions by Confession of Faith have seriously diminished during the past 10 or 15 years.

There has also been in these last 25 years a clear message coming from higher echelons of the church that the business of the church is to be a creative, reforming influence in society. That influence has focussed in such areas as women's rights, civil rights for homosexuals, for prisoners, for those who conscientiously object to participation in war, and the like. During the late 60's the mainline Protestant churches were rather clearly identified with the struggle for human rights. While this drew some adherents it probably cost the church a more substantial number of members who felt that the church was expressing points of view which did not reflect their own.

One of the curious phenomena of these past 25 years has been a development within the mainstream clergy of a highly critical stance toward what has usually been called

evangelism. Pastors young and old react in part to the super-salesmanship for religion seen on television and heard on radio and sometimes exemplified in the Protestant churches in our own communities, and have turned on evangelism and treated it as almost a dirty word. This expresses itself in the view that: "If people want to join the church, attend it, become a part of it, they are certainly welcome. But it's not our job to go out and sell religion like you would sell soap or a used car." This kind of reaction has taken its toll. It is the rare church these days where serious attention is paid to church growth or people are enlisted to become trained to work in the business of acquainting people with the gospel and introducing them to the church and following them through to effective membership in the church. Twenty-five years ago when the western states were still being developed at a rapid rate, this kind of development was carried on, because new communities were seen to need new churches. There wasn't at the time any serious question as to whether those communities ought to be churched or whether the mother churches whose members were moving to the Southwest shouldn't follow them with money and prayers and with a program to develop churches in the midst of these new communities.

Writing in 1979, Carl S. Dudley has presented a treatment of what has happened to the longtime membership

of the mainline Protestant churches. He includes in the introduction to his book what he calls "primary causes" for the dramatic losses in membership:

(1) growing phenomenon of adult believers who have no use for organized religion. (2) the effects of increased mobility upon church membership commitments, and (3) the values of the generation of young adults who directly challenge the most sensitive tenets of the church as we have known it.¹⁸

A few pages later, he writes

Having overextended their credit to house expanding memberships, mainline churches were equally unprepared for the shaky statistics of the early 1960's and for the stunning decline in membership which gathered momentum as the decade ended. Something happened to mainline church membership appeal and commitment. United Methodist church membership declined by more than 1 million in the past decade. Both United Presbyterian and Episcopal churches showed losses of one-half million members each. Membership in the Lutheran church in America is off by a quarter million. For all these denominations the membership curves went up gradually, lingered briefly and declined suddenly.¹⁹

The implications of that?

In this decade of declining membership mainline churches have experienced the chill of self-doubt. Just when it seemed as though the religious boom of the 50's would last forever, somebody changed the rules of the game: the oldest and most prestigious denominations suffered the largest losses. For mainline denominations, this membership decline is the most serious and sustained reversal of religion since the founding of the nation. In losing members, the established churches began to lose self-confidence.²⁰

If that self-confidence has been lost it has been

¹⁸Carl S. Dudley, Where Have All Our People Gone? (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1979), p. xii.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 4.

²⁰Ibid., p. 45.

expressed in several different ways. One is a rationalizing to the effect that smaller is better, that purity of community and integrity of membership is better than a large-scale mass movement with less definition and less integrity. (Illustrated by the quotes on pages 10 and 11.) One of the obvious dangers in this approach is that it is very tempting for pastors and other church leaders to disengage themselves from any responsibility for reaching out with concern for people in the name of Christ to involve them in the life of faith. When this kind of temptation is yielded to, it is usually done with the understanding that the task is to preach the Word, to share the true life of the community and to nurture those who choose to become part of the fellowship. At the same time, it is not the task of the church to advertise, to promote, or to proselytize. About this attitude Allen R. Tippet makes a penetrating observation. He says,

If the Bible still speaks to us, it surely speaks of the diffusion of the salvation experience and the incorporation of the Saved into a fellowship. We need to keep this in mind in a day when 'The mission of the church' is sometimes reduced to mere dialogue, to service projects, or to the fight for social justice.²¹

Tippet's book of only 80 pages pays respect to these "Missional concerns", but says that there is certainly no substitute for identifying, diffusing, and sharing the

²¹Alan R. Tippet, Church Growth And The Word of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 12.

salvation experience. He makes it very clear that if we look for our directions to the New Testament, then we see that the main business of the early church was to share the gospel in a public and vocal way and to win people's allegiance to the faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

If we see the church 25 years ago in the midst of a post-World War II boom which it had done nothing particularly to generate, and if we see the church 10 years ago at a point of increasing self-doubt, then we may well see the situation today as one where the church has an opportunity to learn from recent history, to take its bearings and to invest the best of its learnings in a new vision of the church's mission for the future. Hopefully, that vision would include integrity for the church, a clear mission of service in the world, and a vigorous program of church growth, to keep faith with Biblical roots.

CHAPTER IV

Research used in this chapter has been secured through a 4-page questionnaire circulated to 96 United Methodist pastors in the Pacific and Southwest Annual Conference. 50 were returned completed. They represent a random sampling of the pastors of the Annual Conference including males and females of various ages and various ethnic groups as well as various lengths of service in pastoral ministry.

The questionnaire developed for this study was to research how working ministers, United Methodist pastors serving in the Pacific and Southwest Annual Conference, see their role as church-growth facilitators. There are a number of different words and phrases that can be used to describe what this mission is about: "evangelist," "out-reach program," and "parish development." The main concern is that the church does everything it can, within its integrity, to involve new persons effectively in the life of the church. Those who responded to the questionnaire were asked to understand, for the purposes of this study, church growth to be the intentional building up of church membership by all appropriate means. The 50 respondents to the questionnaire had served in the appointed ministry from 1½ to 46 years. The bulk of those responding were in the "10 to 30 years of service" bracket. However, there was

good representation from those with fewer than 10 years and those with more than 30 years. The kinds of appointments those pastors had served reflected to a large degree the nature of Southwestern community. There were approximately 20 who had served from 1 to 7 years in rural parishes; there were 13 who had served from 1 to 13 years in inner city parishes; there were 22 who had served from 1 to 20 years in urban parishes; and there were some 40 who had served anywhere from 1 to 30 years in suburban parishes.

When asked whether they came originally from a church home which was strongly evangelical, or one which was more social-action oriented, or one with a balance, there were 12 who identified themselves as coming from strongly evangelical backgrounds; 1 from a social-action oriented church, and 34 considered their church to be tipped neither one way nor the other. In addition there were 3 pastors who saw that none of the above categories fitted their situation. If we are to read any meaning into these responses it is that the largest bulk of candidates for the ministry come from those churches where a good balance is maintained between evangelism and social action. We suspect that the nature of a person's ministry will root in his church experience prior to a call to the ministry.

When asked to rank their concern for church growth among or along with five other priorities which included

preaching and worship, small group work, counseling, community and social action, and Christian education, the results were these: 4 listed concern for church growth as top priority; 12 listed it as their second place concern; 12 put it in third place; 11 ranked it fourth, 2 ranked it fifth; 7 put it at the bottom of the list in sixth place; and 1 (evidently attempting to be humorous) listed it as his seventh priority. This kind of ranking of priorities would indicate that church growth is a medium-range priority for the bulk of pastors.

When asked how they ranked their concern for church growth with where they felt it was 10 years ago and 25 years ago, the results were these: 15 felt they put less priority on it in the past, and 7 felt that they had put more priority on it in the past and less at present. The remaining 28 indicated that there had been no change in their working priority on this concern. These statistical results are not terribly significant other than to say that there are a few more pastors who feel that it is more important for them than it was at one time, than there are who feel it is now less important. When asked to comment on why there might have been a change in these priorities, there were some very interesting responses: "I see small group work as a means of enabling growth as well as preaching and worship. I strive for a balance with growth as a

result gained." "I consider church growth to be an integral part of the church program. Growth has not always been a numbers game in my ministry. In only one parish (an associateship) was this the case. I would prefer to see growth take place within the total program of the church at the level of meaningful participation." Again, "Evangelism and church growth have always been strong motivational forces in my ministry." A rather common theme in the respondents is that expressed in this sentence: "To put church growth before people is not my understanding of the gospel."

A response which indicates how these several priorities are inseparable goes this way: "Obviously all areas are of critical concern. The preaching and worship priority is set by the very nature of Methodism. Counseling seeks ministry to individuals and families in crisis. Education is truly essential. Good work in these three causes church growth to happen in a healthy way." One rather surprising response was "my concern for Christianity has transcended church application."

Many a working pastor feels pressured to produce. One person in the ministry for 35 years said, "I used to feel more compelled to have good statistics. However, following pastors in a couple of instances who had been 'gung ho' for growth showed me statistics are not always what they seem." One who has evidently been in ministry for some time said

that 25 years ago growth was easy to achieve, today it is not. Another pastor wrote: "Twenty-five years ago, growth was a prime evaluator of effectiveness; ten years ago it was discredited." And another pastor, working on the same theme said, "It got to be a numbers game." At the same time, a pastor who has been in ministry for over 40 years writes,

There has been no change for me because I believe evangelism is the number one priority in ministry. Unless we continue to reach new people for Christ and the church, none of the others will have any significance.

One pastor, having completed 27 years in suburban churches, says: "New growth doesn't happen automatically, it takes attention and it is essential to the survival of the mission of the church. I discovered someone has to build the church."

An attitude presented by several pastors is reflected in this statement: "It's difficult to assign a numerical figure to church growth. I've always been in a growing situation. I have emphasized growth as I have given attention to developing an all-around good program." Another writer noted the different context in which church growth is carried on these days, saying,

Emphasis 25 years ago was on meeting the impact of post World War II family growth and the spiritual emphasis of the time. This need has diminished over the years with the 'settling in' of society to the growing secularization of the culture and turning away from 'established' religion.

Perhaps the real divergence of attitudes towards

church growth is reflected in these two sentences from two veteran pastors. One writes: "I saw in the church growth of the 50's a surface relationship and not true commitment." The other, a pastor for 36 years: "I came to see the need to see the church institutionally viable if other priorities are to be possible. I had a growing awareness of this each year."

All of this reflects the great variety of ways in which working pastors see the place and priority of church growth in their ministry. We have the mixed bag of responses with some who have moved slowly in one direction or the other, and some who have stayed essentially where they began.

Another question asked on the questionnaire was: "Do you feel that church growth is a concern for specific situations like new church development and expanding neighborhoods and less in other situations?" The respondents generally felt that it was not, with 10 responding "yes", 35 responding "no" and 5 uncertain. The indication here is that most respondents felt that church growth is a concern everywhere; that there were certainly places where it was more possible, but that church growth was a concern in every parish.

Another series of questions asked "How much impact do you feel denominational or Annual Conference emphases on

church growth have on your own ministry, related to church growth?" Responses could be "substantial", "quite a bit", "some", or "hardly any." There were 5 who felt it was a substantial relationship; 5 who felt it was quite a bit; 25 who felt that there was some relationship; and the remaining 15 who felt that it had little or no impact on their emphases in ministry.

A further question in this area asked, "How would you estimate the impact the enabling and equipping from denominational and/or Annual Conferences has on your emphasis and ability in the church growth area?" There were only 2 respondents who felt that it had a substantial impact; 4 who thought it had quite a bit of impact; 22 who felt there was some impact; and the balance (including 2 who said "none")--that it had little or no impact.

A third question probing the influence coming from beyond the local church asked the question: "How do you feel hierarchical or Annual Conference goals and expectancies in the area of church growth influence your time and effort in this area?" The responses were quite parallel to those in the second question. There were 2 who felt it influenced "quite a bit"; 26 who felt there was some influence; and the other 22 who felt there was "hardly any", or no impact at all.

To summarize the meaning of the responses to these

last three questions: it appears that the expectancies of the hierarchy and the institution, the equipping provided, and the goals established beyond the local church have very little effect on the practice or work of the local pastor. As a matter of fact there were a number of responses indicating that many pastors felt very strongly that what happened beyond the local church had little to do with their performance. Several indicated that it was almost a negative influence--that they would resist strongly any expectancies or direction from beyond the local parish situation. If this is true, it means that the equipping or motivation has to be related very directly and very personally to pastors rather than having it become a denominational emphasis or a church-wide program.

The next area of questions dealt with how pastors felt church growth ought to be treated in the denomination, in seminary education, in the judgment by the hierarchy of the pastor's effectiveness, and in a local church's judgment as to pastoral effectiveness. The responses in this area were not totally consistent with those in the previous three questions. The responses were these: To the question, "Do you feel United Methodism should put more, the same, or less emphasis on church growth?", 38 of the 50 responses indicated Methodism should put more emphasis; there were 8 who said "the same", and there were 4 who indicated we

should put less emphasis on church growth. This was an unusually strong response in one specific category indicating a unanimity of opinion that obtained in few other responses. There was an even more consistent response to the second question which asked, "Do you feel the area of church growth should or should not be a part of seminary education?" Of the 50 respondents, there were only 2 who felt that it should not be a part of seminary education. The remaining 48 indicated that it should be.

A more wide-ranging series of responses came to the question: "Do you feel the Cabinet of the Annual Conference should judge a pastor's ministry by his or her effectiveness in church growth?" Five thought the judgment should be "substantial" in relation to church growth; 16 felt it should be "quite a bit", 22 felt it should be "somewhat"; 4 felt that it should have "hardly any" relationship; and 3 felt that there should be another kind of judgment. Of these 3, 1 responded, "Judge by total ministry, that is, preaching and education, social concerns, evangelism, and the like." A second respondent said that each situation is unique and it's best to evaluate it as such. Finally, the third respondent said the meaning of church growth is so ambiguous that it is impossible to say how much influence it ought to have on the judgment of a pastor's work.

Responding to the fourth question in this area:

"Do you feel the local church should judge pastoral leadership by the criterion of church growth?", 4 respondents indicated that it should be a "substantial" part of the criteria; 14 felt that it should have "quite a bit" of impact on the judgment; 24 felt it should have "some" impact; 5 felt that it should have "hardly any" consideration at all and several felt that there were other things to be said in response to this question. These other responses were generally along the theme that the situation ought to be judged in and of itself; that parish situations varied so much that there should be no uniform kind of criteria or judgment used for each and every parish.

Summing up this area of questioning, it appears that pastors feel that there ought to be much more emphasis in the denomination upon church growth; that it very definitely ought to be a part of seminary education, but that cabinets and local church committees should not necessarily apply the criterion of church growth as a guide to the effectiveness of a pastor's work in the parish. The prevailing view seems to be that there are some places where church growth can take place, others where it may not; and that in fact there are many situations where to maintain the parish as a viable institution is a victory in itself.

This research also explored feelings toward how loss of membership over the past 10-25 years is perceived

within the denomination by its pastors. This question was asked: "Do you feel the present concern about loss of membership over the past decade in United Methodism is (1) a top priority concern, (2) one of equal importance with many others, or (3) not a leading priority?" The answers were fairly even across these three response possibilities: 18 felt that it was a top priority concern; 19 felt that it was of equal importance with many others; and 13 felt that it was not a leading priority.

The second question in this general area asked "Do you feel we in the United Methodist church have something to learn from the church growth advocates of our time?" The responses could be "Yes," "No," or "Uncertain." 35 of the 50 respondents said yes, 6 said no, and 9 checked uncertain. This would indicate an openness to learn from a source which seems to have real expertise in this area, and that United Methodist pastors are willing to reach beyond their denominational boundaries to learn from those who are achieving success in this field.

The third question in this area asked: "Do you feel church growth is something which comes if we do a good job at the other tasks of parish ministry?" The intention here was to see if pastors feel that church growth is a substantially unique or separate part of church life, or is something which happens as other parish ministry tasks are

out with effectiveness. Here there was a rather strong positive response: 23 answered "yes", (there was a correlation) 23 answered "somewhat", and 4 answered "no impact" on church growth.

Summing up this general area: it appears that pastors feel that church decline is an important concern within the denomination; that we do have much to learn from the advocates and teachers of church growth, but that church growth really happens when a good job is done in the whole task of ministry.

The final sequence of questions related to pastors' judgments about how the pastoral role itself impinges upon church growth. The first question read: "Do you feel church growth is an area where strong pastoral leadership is particularly called for?" The respondents were invited to check "Yes," "No," or "Other." The responses were very strongly in the "yes" area with 44 of the 50 respondents checking "yes," 4 checking "no," and 2 checking "other." The "Other" response is amplified by accompanying statements, "It is a lay concern," and "If laymen don't wish the church to grow, it won't."

The second question in this area asked, "Do you feel church growth deserves more of your time and effort than you now give to it?" 35 of the 50 checked "Yes," and 15 checked "no." When asked the question, "Which direction do you feel

the priority for church growth has taken in your ministry during your pastoral career?", there were 19 who checked "Stayed about the same," 23 who said "It has gained in importance," and 8 who felt it had "lessened in importance." This seems to indicate that today there are more pastors who feel that at the present time this is a higher priority for them than it used to be.

Exploring pastoral attitudes toward the ease or difficulty of enlisting new persons for commitment to Christ and the church, this question was asked: "Is it more difficult than it was ten years ago?" The responses: 6 felt it was "less difficult"; 23 felt it was "more difficult"; and 16 felt that it was "of equal difficulty" as ten years before. 5 respondents did not check this because they had not been in the ministry ten years ago. When asked to compare with how it was 25 years ago, 1 said it is less difficult than 25 years ago; 28 said that it is more difficult; and 14 said that it was of about the same difficulty as 25 years ago. The perception here is almost unanimous: that recruitment is more difficult for pastors than it was 25 years ago.

Two paragraphs ago, we described how pastors had rated their own concern for church growth as having stayed the same or increased in recent years. Their answer to a question about their perception of other pastors' concerns

gave a different kind of response. This question was, "Do you feel that the recent losses in United Methodist membership reflect a lesser priority given to church growth by pastors and people in recent years?" 30 of the 50 respondents said "Yes", 14 said "No" and 6 checked "Other". This would seem to imply that while pastors felt their own church growth priority had risen, they judged that this priority for their brothers and sisters in the ministry had lowered, and that this had resulted in a negative impact on accessions to membership and to church growth.

The final objective question asked: "Would you rank these "reasons for church growth" in your personal ministry, giving the number 1 to that ranked highest, and among the six categories the number 6 to that which you rank lowest." The categories were: "Want a successful ministry"; "Feel the gospel calls to evangelize everyone"; "Means eternal salvation for every believer added"; "Makes for a better community"; "Results in better, happier personal and family living"; and finally, "It's expected of me". Totalling the responses, the second category, "Feel the gospel calls to evangelize everyone" emerged as their top reason for engaging in church growth. They ranked "Results in better, happier personal and family living" in second place; they put "makes for a better community" in third place; "Want a successful ministry" in fourth place; "Means eternal

salvation for every believer added" in fifth place; and ranked the lowest: "It's expected of me." There were 2 respondents who ranked "Want a successful ministry" first; 31 who put highest "Feels the gospel calls to evangelize everyone"; none rated "Eternal salvation" first; 4 chose "Makes for a better community" as top ranked; 12 rated highest "It results in better, happier personal and family living"; and 1 rated first "It's expected of me". Here we find a rather interesting combination of responses, with what might be considered a really traditional response, namely, "Feels the gospel calls to evangelize everyone" ranked in first place. Another "traditional" statement: "That it means eternal salvation for every believer added" did not rank nearly as high and was placed in a high priority by only a few pastors. Evidently the pastors felt that the gospel call to evangelism was to a fuller, happier personal family life and to a stronger community rather than to a decision which had eternal dimensions. If this is true, it means that training for evangelism and church growth needs to key on these factors with pastors rather than on the factors of choosing eternal life or securing salvation from judgment and damnation.

A final question in the research asked respondents to share any feelings they might have about the issues of church growth and the pastor's calling in regard to it,

which might not have been addressed in the objective questions. A sample of responses follows:

My concern is for balance. We had church growth as a statistical gain which was meaningless and quantitative. Church growth as a qualitative experience must be informed biblically and theologically as well as logically and socially. United Methodists just must not buy all the success movements for success reasons, but only in our commitment with integrity.

Another response said:

Church growth is basically a theological issue. If it's just nice for people to come to church there will be one attitude. If knowing Christ is absolutely critical to meaning and purpose in life here and hereafter, there will be another. Our church has become so soft in its Christology that just anything goes and it's okay if you are sincere in what you believe. Frankly I think the church is in real trouble. I doubt that clergy-laity will pay the price for what needs to be done to keep the church from dying because of attrition.

A response which indicated great trust in the church in its ongoing ministry read this way:

The United Methodist Church has always been a concerned church, concerned about all the areas of Christian life. We have just passed through an era of tremendous social awareness and social change and, thank God, our church has been in the forefront, showing the way in many areas of concern: social dissent, war protest, racism, ecology, women's liberation, abortion, to mention just a few areas. Social awareness may have been accomplished at the cost of other areas of Christian concern and expression. However, to have ignored the need for social witness would have been a denial of our unique heritage as United Methodists. Now today as always the church is again evaluating its needs and moving to respond to the important areas of church life. It may be church growth, it may be spiritual growth, it may be some other area of concern--whatever, our great United Methodist church will continue its unique witness.

One of the strongest statements about the whole

business of church growth was made by the pastor who said,

I think that the Christian church is concerned about growth for the wrong reasons. You get more people; you get more money; you can have more national and Conference staff positions. I would suggest the church abolish at least one half of all staff positions and tell the minister to do the job he or she was educated to do. Those who can't do the job, find them a job elsewhere. And by the job I mean living, preaching and teaching of faith that expects something from becoming Christians. If the United Methodist Church took the Christian faith seriously, we would lose six million members today.

That particular pastor has carried that philosophy into action, maintaining a low membership and high performance church and presumably shares with his lay people this vision as a model for the church of tomorrow.

One of the briefest responses in this area was from a pastor who simply said, "Work!!"

Another kind of response came from a pastor who said,

Church growth for United Methodism depends upon much needed church extension. A faithful church is more of a priority for me than a growing church, although I believe a faithful church can and should be a growing church too. I think many of the growing churches in other denominations have sold out to civil and success-oriented philosophies of hedonism; that is, happiness is the goal of life, and Jesus can make us happy and help us fulfill our goals. I fear in the crude hunger for statistical results this is a grave temptation. Fortunately I do not see many Methodists yielding to it.

There were several pastors who took a rather cynical attitude toward the whole issue being treated in this paper. One of them responded at this point by saying, "What does an institutional growth problem have to do with the gospel?" The feeling here is that being faithful to the gospel has

nothing at all to do with church growth or decline. Another response took a much more philosophical direction and read this way:

Alfred North Whitehead wrote in Adventures of Ideas: 'I hazard to prophesy that the religion will conquer which can render clear to popular understanding eternal greatness incarnate in the passage of temporal fact.' Helping persons see 'Greatness in the ordinary passage of time' is the chief task of the ministry. We need to help persons answer the question 'How can I use what I believe to deal with my present life?' Growth will be a byproduct of this kind of ministry. The world of faith and the world of daily living have to be brought together. That church will grow which brings together the world view of daily discourse and the world view of biblical and religious instruction.

A response which was similar in sense but not in its rootage read this way:

I am for working to build a community of believers who share their faith in the kind of life we live--who want to nurture the young and invite friends and relatives and a stranger in their midst to come with them to church. I'm not yet ready to mass-produce a package of evangelism.

A deep note of envy was struck by the pastor who said:

My question is not very profound, but I am concerned with the matter of church growth, especially when I see all these unorthodox groups growing by leaps and bounds. Here we are with all kinds of resources, enablers, consultants, District and Conference staff, general staff, etc. and these people with nothing more than half-way education are doing things that just amaze me. I criticize their methods in every way possible. But still they seem to get the people in and grow. What would happen if they had the educated clergy, the experts and the resources that we have, and all the thousands of possibilities our Methodist clergy have at their disposal?

That kind of question can't be answered directly,

but it recognizes that the job is getting done by people who seem far less resourced for it than the United Methodist clergy of our time.

A deep concern for the motivation for church growth was struck by one pastor who used a simple analogy when he said,

I see church growth like increased sales in business. A merchant or insurance salesman, for example, wants to continue to service their customers. But because they believe in what they are selling, they know that there will be some customers lost, so they seek to increase their sales. Sometimes I wonder if the clergy really believe in the church enough to want to work for church growth.

One pastor wrote a statement which I feel reflects the attitude of many pastors who might not have put it in such a well-thought-out paragraph:

For me, church growth is a theological issue and therefore not an option. It has both internal (spiritual) and external (numerical) dimensions. There is no guarantee of net numerical growth, yet the Acts account as well as historical evidence suggest that it results. It seems to me that our fault as a church has been to claim that by simply proclaiming the truth we have fulfilled our mission. And furthermore the proclamation is to those who come to us rather than our reaching out to them. Therefore we have taken no responsibility to organize for outreach or done little with motivation. I feel we need proper motivation, conviction, organization and assimilation. Church growth to me is something of a misnomer. I see it as a gospel imperative. And if we are doing our job evangelistically it will happen. That of course does not discount the importance and necessity of proper organization and sensitivity. But it does irritate me to be asked 'Do you believe in church growth.' If we believe in the New Testament, that is part of what we accept.

That pastor's attitude is poles apart from another who wrote:

The focus on growth is both non-Biblical and heretical biblically. Until we clarify who we are, who we represent, and how we represent it, church growth becomes another ineffective bureaucratic ploy.

One pastor who has had an effective church growth ministry sees the whole task in these terms:

We have slipped behind in church growth because we have given it much too low a priority. The denomination and Conference don't stress it enough or expect enough. So we coast. Another major factor is the Conference's expectation that the local church exists solely to perpetuate and serve the Conference. I believe the opposite is true. I am pressured to give far more of my time and effort to Conference and district assignments than is humanly possible. The local church suffers. Much of what we do above the local church level is unnecessary, yet so time consuming. If independent churches are growing faster it's probably because they are not so pressured by a system which always succeeds in making almost everything more complicated. I believe in carrying my weight, but I wish Conference would take a greater interest in people at the local church level. While social concerns are important, I think we must never forget our main goal: to relate persons to God and Jesus Christ. If we forget that, we become little more than a social service agency.

That attitude may not have been spelled out as precisely by other respondents, but through personal conversations this writer senses that it does, in fact, represent the attitude of many working pastors.

Another pastor brought several strands together with this comment:

It is my conviction that our concern ought to be more on the quality of life in the Christian community, on special needs of our people and honest commitment to Jesus Christ. I believe the sacraments need to be emphasized and seen as true means of God's grace. We need a concern about the issues of our time; but also a renewed persuasion about the issues of eternal life. We have lost our vision of heaven.

An ethnic pastor writes: "A church will grow only when the members want it to grow. The nucleus of every church is 35 members. Unless those persons want growth it is unlikely to happen."

One of the pastors noted that church growth really does relate to "situation." He says,

Church growth is an emotional term. Who can be against either church or growth? But there are many kinds of growth: spiritual, moral, social, Christian, numerical, etc. More emphasis can be placed on increased numbers of people if the church is in a situation where new people are coming to the community. In many areas where large growth and numbers are experienced, the church will grow numerically regardless of the pastoral leadership. And in other situations the church will decrease in numbers regardless of the leadership. So I am suggesting a topic like situational growth (not unlike situation ethics) would be worth exploring in this connection.

One pastor emphasized the change in social setting across the past 25 years. He says,

Pastor and lay calling are lost ministries. When the front porch moved to the back yard patio both laity and clergy stopped visiting as a general and necessary ministry of the church to the community and congregation. Now most pastors and lay people will do anything else before they do calling. The fear of rejection and ineffectiveness is traumatic in my experience with both groups. Our church is not yet turned inside out. It is still waiting for people to find it.

A final quotation indicates what may be the attitude of a number of pastors at this time.

I have a strong feeling that church growth is the fad of the late 70's. Somehow we had been led to feel that if the arena is not packed as at the Super Bowl, then the church is failing. Perhaps the grossly inflated rolls of the post-war guilt years of 1950-65 are properly being thinned now. For 90 percent of the nation's

history much less than 50 percent of the population was churched (20% in Civil War days) and the evangelical movement across the land was very strong. When everyone is in the church, or born again, it is probably a sign of cheap grace again. If getting more members means that we have to be in the popularity or entertainment business, then perhaps it isn't worth it.

Looking back on the variety of subjective responses, we discover that there is a wide, wide variety of feelings and attitudes toward the church growth priority. Some pastors emphasize that it is a very definite part of the New Testament message; some feel that growth comes along with other ministries of the church being carried out in strong fashion; many feel that it has not been given enough emphasis by pastors and by local churches; some note that there has been a real decline across the past 25 years in the involvement of lay people in calling and visitation programs which had been one of the instruments of church growth. There is a kind of judgment abroad that church growth is a very cheap experience, that for church growth advocates, numbers take precedence over people, and that the kind of salesmanship used in some of the rapidly growing churches is something which Methodists simply could not use with any kind of integrity. And there is some envy of those who are working the same neighborhoods that we are, with better results in church growth.

At this point it would be appropriate to include a statement as to the membership numbers in the Pacific and

Southwest Annual Conference these past 25 years. In 1954, when the westward tilt was hardly begun, the churches of the Annual Conference counted 162,828 members. Five years later the count was 217,513, a gain of over 54,000 in a very brief period of time. In the next five years that membership had climbed another 46,000 to 263,771. That meant that in just ten years membership in the churches of this Annual Conference had increased by over 100,000. By 1969 the process had slowed. There were 39 more pastoral charges than in 1964, but the total membership had climbed only a few hundred, to 264,424. In 1974 the membership had decreased by over 44,000 to 220,232. For the most recent full year that statistics are available, (reported as of December 31, 1978), the 1979 Conference Journal listed a membership of 196,483. That means that in the decline from a peak experienced toward the end of the 1960's, we have experienced a rate of loss almost the same as the church experienced as rate of growth during the expansion years.

Comparing membership accessions for the same years: in 1954 there were 23,529 members received; in 1959 the total was 29,539; in 1964 it peaked at 31,790; in 1969, a year for which only seven months were recorded in the Annual Conference Journal, the total received was 13,136; in 1974 it was 17,082; and in the most recent Journal it is 14,844. That increase and decline in accessions parallels almost

exactly the membership increases or losses for those periods. While churches of late have been paring their rolls and withdrawing substantial numbers of members by "Charge Conference action," this is not the greatest or the most significant reason for loss of membership in United Methodism in this Annual Conference.

One of the realities this study must address is that the whole world view of the mid-50's was quite different from that of the mid-60's and certainly from that of the late 1970's. The 50's, the "Eisenhower era," so called, were years of family development. They were years during which the typical pastor received a very positive welcome on the part of the people. Those were the years in which many pastors spent a great deal of time visiting in homes and talking to people about church and church programs, about the faith, and about that family's involvement in it. Today we are more security conscious, and in many of the great metropolitan centers these days people are just not as open to casual pastoral visits as they were 25 years ago. If these pastoral visits are not made, it means that the kind of conversations that often led to commitment not too many years ago just don't take place.

Twenty-five years ago and perhaps even 15 years ago, there was public recognition of parishes that were doing a strong job in church growth. At sessions of what was then

the Southern California-Arizona Annual Conference of the Methodist Church during the 1950's and 1960's, a high point came when the Conference statistician read the names of the 10 churches that had recorded the largest number of accessions to membership during the previous year. This was a proud moment for those churches and their pastors, and the applause was loud and long. Such public recognition died out during the 1970's. For whatever reason the change was made, the recognition of church growth took a lower priority in the Conference sessions.

At another level, the attention paid to evangelism in the 1950's is illustrated by the writer's personal experience in helping host the October, 1959, Council of Evangelism meeting in Hollywood, California. This week-long venture brought together hundreds of Methodist pastors from across the nation to receive instruction and inspiration in the evangelistic cause, and then disperse to the churches of the Annual Conference to engage in evangelistic visitation with clergy and lay people of the host churches. The summary report of the program listed 385 participating churches, 405 guest ministers and laymen, 15,000 lay visitors, 46,500 persons interviewed, 12,390 commitments. Such a large-scale event would be unlikely today, but at the time it represented an evangelistic fervor by the general church with a focus on a part of the country that was then

exploding with new growth in population. Often when church growth is mentioned within the United Methodist Conference today, it is treated as "Well they are into the numbers game"... or "That's really not the important thing anymore."

It would be a difficult task for this writer to identify a very focussed point of view among a very mixed set of reactions and attitudes and values placed on the business of evangelism and church growth. The feeling that seems most commonly expressed is that church growth must be a matter approached with integrity. No ministers seem inclined to treat the business of church growth from a purely statistical standpoint. None see growth in and of itself as a faithful criterion of pastoral effectiveness and of church vitality.

One of the factors that was not remarked upon by any of the respondents was that the institution, in and of itself, may in fact be one of the real obstacles to church growth. It may be that there are many people who are sympathetic to the Christian faith, and yet feel that they cannot or will not identify with the institutional church.

CHAPTER V

In the year 1957, Charles B. Templeton, then a well-known "new evangelist", wrote a very thoughtful book entitled Evangelism For Tomorrow. (Not too long after this book's publication, Templeton left the church and became an evangelical anti-theist. Nevertheless, the substance of the book remains helpful.) Many of the issues which he treated anticipated the issues which would be raised in later years. In 1957 church evangelism was going well. As a thoughtful observer and participant in the evangelism movement, Templeton raised some serious questions. His concept of evangelism was one which would win wide support today. He said:

The goal of evangelism is not to make converts. It is to produce mature Christians. Jesus was precise in giving the church her great commission. He sent the church out, not to make converts, but to make disciples. The term "disciple" means learner. Evangelism does not seek only to win men to Christ, it seeks to win them to Christ and the church. Not to one or the other, but to both.²²

Another Templeton emphasis: "A pastor's first responsibility is not to do evangelism, but to produce an evangelizing church. The church is the principal evangelizing agency."²³ Developing that thought, he adds that while pastors are few,

²²Charles B. Templeton, Evangelism For Tomorrow (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 45.

²³Ibid., p. 53.

church members are many, and that in addition to number, their potential for contacts in the ordinary avenues of life are the ones in which evangelism can and should take place. However, he puts strong emphasis on the fact that the pastor is to lead by example as well as by instruction.

Toward the close of his book, Templeton wrote:

At the constituting assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1951, Stephen Neill, a Bishop of the Church of England, and then Secretary of the World Council, concluded his address to the assembled ecclesiastics by leaning forward and asking simply and quietly, 'How long is it since you personally led someone to Jesus Christ?'²⁴

That, Templeton pointed out, was the question which ought to be addressed to all Christian ministers. He said: "It is precisely for this purpose--the winning of others to Christ--that we have ourselves been won to the church. It is, in fact, the church's calling."²⁵ Analyzing why this kind of example and instruction is not taking place, he says, "Preaching for a verdict has often seemed demeaning."²⁶ "Preaching for a verdict" has been so abused that some ministers are disinclined to be even remotely connected with seeking what in evangelical circles are called "decisions for Christ." Another reason Templeton cited for a decline in pulpit ministry in the area of evangelism is the fear of an adverse reaction. That is, pastors are hesitant to venture into the field because of their

²⁴Ibid., p. 129. ²⁵Ibid. ²⁶Ibid., p. 130.

uncertainty about response and because they might anticipate some of their non-evangelical constituents raising serious objections. Again, Templeton noted that many preachers fail to preach evangelistically because they personally shrink from the serious involvement that evangelism calls for in the preacher. "The man who would give a serious call to Christ," he wrote, "must first scrutinize his own life and make sure he speaks from a solid foundation of personal experience. To some this is uncomfortable and to others it is impossible."²⁷ Continuing, Templeton says that the temptation in ministry is to speak in very general terms; to speak about attitudes and movements, and never to approach, directly, personal decision-making. He writes:

The minister, dealing as he does with the central choice in life, cannot be content to speak vaguely about the necessity for commitment. As James Black has said, 'Our business is serious gunfire with a target.' Too much Christian preaching is like sheet lightning--it is general. It was said of one minister that he had 'the art of almost saying something.' This is not to suggest that there must be the labored pointing of a moral or public invitation at the end of each discourse. It means simply that whether evident or implicit, the call to commitment is essential to Christian preaching.²⁸

Templeton's call to a serious, intentional, and well-thought-out evangelism based on experience and centered in the church was timely in 1957 and seems to be the direction that is being called for by most of the respondents to the questionnaire used in this study.

²⁷Ibid., p. 133. ²⁸Ibid., p. 142.

One of the more useful books pointed toward contemporary evangelism and focussing on the congregational approach is a book by George G. Hunter III entitled The Contagious Congregation. In a chapter titled "Communicating The Gospel To A Resistant Secular Culture," Hunter lists five strategies for communicating the gospel in such a context. The first is: "because secular people are largely ignorant rather than knowledgeable about basic Christian matters, one essential element of the church's strategy must be instruction."²⁹ Hunter uses Lord Donald Soper, the prominent British evangelical preacher, as a model of one who begins at the beginning with outsiders rather than beginning in the middle or beginning at the end. Soper's intent is to describe what Christianity is basically about, to get at the fundamentals of what Jesus Christ taught, and what the Apostle claimed about Him. And to do this patiently, over and over again. The second element which Hunter lifts up is that of facing the fact of widespread religious doubt. He lifts up the need for stress on dialogue, and sharing the gospel within dialogue. The fact of doubt, the fact of questions, the fact of cynicism, must be taken seriously. The gospel cannot be proclaimed, and a call to commitment to Christ made, without some thoughtful connection being

²⁹George G. Hunter, III, The Contagious Congregation (New York: Abingdon Press, 1979), p. 98.

made to the mental and religious reality of our time. Thirdly, Hunter lifts up the fact that we need to demonstrate the credibility of Christian people. He quotes Stephen Neill, previously mentioned in this study, as writing that the initial factor in the conversion of many non-Christians was their perception of "some action on the part of a Christian which presented itself as radically different from the kind of action which would have been taken by a non-Christian in similar circumstances."³⁰ The point is that in both preaching and practice, listeners and observers need to see, hear and feel that in fact Christian commitment does make a difference and leads to an adventurous, risky style of life which can grip the imagination and draw a call to commitment. Fourthly, Hunter suggests that preachers need to take seriously the fact that secular people do not perceive the relevance of Christianity to their needs and to their motives. And so he suggests that evangelical pastors be well aware of the hierarchy of human motivations, the priorities of needs which people face. That is to say, the basic realities of human experience. To these needs and to these motivations the gospel needs to be related as a real potential for guidance, and for power.

Finally, Hunter suggests people today are alienated from their neighbors and so the Christian community needs to

³⁰Ibid., p. 99.

provide that Christian resources we call Koinonia, that is a meaningful, supportive, loving and esteem-giving fellowship. In other generations it has been called "the beloved community." Hunter suggests that there is a real need to call us to be members one of another, based on the New Testament quotation, "See how these Christians love one another."

In listing ways in which the Christian message relates especially to the setting, Hunter suggests these three points: first, that our culture is less death-oriented than previous ones, and more life-oriented. So the opportunity is to present a message for the human pilgrimage through life, to discover meaning, and give some point to the journey. The message would issue in this statement, "In Christ and His mission to the church you can find your meaning. Christ is the clue. Following Him leads to meaning." Hunter adds that for college students and young urban adults this is a particularly important word to share. Secondly, he says that since so much alienation is experienced by today's people, we need to proclaim the message "you are known and loved." Certainly this is implicit in the New Testament message and it needs to find practical expression for persons to know that "God loves you, and I love you too." That is probably an over-simplified slogan, but the heart of the message is there.

Thirdly, Hunter says people need to be enlisted for great causes. In this sense evangelism becomes a handmaid

to mission, or to the expression of mission which we call social action. That is to say, people should not be called into the fellowship simply to be accepted and to be loved, but to be empowered to do great things in their individual lives. Hunter's book is particularly useful because he goes on to speak about the realities of the church growth situation wherein pastors and concerned Christians and lay folk analyze how connections are really made in the evangelistic enterprise. That is: family connections, neighbors, fellow workers, people who share other associations. He notes that often times when one person is won to the cause, that person becomes the link to a good-sized group of others who see something good happening in that person's life, who discover that there is a new sense of identity, a new sense of cause and purpose, a new motivation at work. Either by that person's invitation, or by a natural response of their own, these others come to find out what is going on. Too often, pastors and congregations are totally insensitive to this great fact. Hunter notes that one of the fine scholars of church growth, Lyle Schaller, has asked many first generation members of churches, "Why are you a member of this church?" and has discovered that two-thirds to three-fourths have given a response that can be classified as either "friendship ties" or "kinship ties." This again is a fact which has been paid too little notice.

Again, Hunter notes the opportunity for a new spirit of evangelism to reach to the present population. He suggests that we are in the early part of a 15-20 year period during which there will be greater numbers of young, receptive families. That would parallel the experience which America knew between 1945 and 1961. That means an opportunity for evangelism in the form of reaching out to young families with specialized ministries to provide relevant education, support, guidance, and community for families similar to those who were such a significant part of the churches some 25-30 years ago.

Another most interesting part of the mix that will determine how churches are headed in evangelism involves the personal identity of clergy. That is to say, the roles which clergy understand they are equipped to play, and are called to play, within the church and within the culture.

Hoge and Roozen make this perceptive remark:

Over this same period of time... there has been some confusion over just what clergy should be doing in the church and in the world. This confusion has been reflected in what has been going on in theological education. Since the 1950's, theological institutions, in which mainline Protestant leadership is trained, have passed into the hands of presidents and professors, many of whom found Peale 'appalling' and were wary of supporting Graham-type evangelistic efforts. Moreover, they were influenced by the famous studies of H. Richard Niebuhr, Daniel Day Williams, and James Gustafson, who wrote and edited "The Ministry In Historical Perspective, 1956" and "The Purpose Of The Church And Its Ministry, 1956". The chief pattern for the Christian leader projected in these studies was that of the pastor-director. While clergy would continue to fulfill the

ministry of the Word and sacrament, they would actually focus on administering the affairs of the congregation and on enabling others to fulfill the witness of the body of Christ in love to God and to neighbor. While this model, descriptive of what many ministers were already doing, may be theoretically a good one for encouraging participation and membership in the church, it may also have the effect of reducing the minister to an organization man in grey flannel clerical garb. As Robert Lee has pointed out, training for the role of pastor-director may lead to the 'depersonalization of charisma' and to the education of functionaries at the expense of personal inspiration which leaders also need.³¹

This writer feels, on the basis of the research questionnaire and on personal conversations and observations, that this is a field well worth further study and analysis, because so many contemporary Christian clergy are very hesitant to assume the role of an evangelist, of being very directive in pointing people toward the source of faith, toward Christ and the church. Further, many contemporary clergy seem to feel that people come into the church more through programming, and through witness in the community, than in their response to a proclamation and to a community which addresses their own personal spiritual needs. Here, it seems to me, is one of the frontiers for exploration to discover why in the great Protestant evangelical tradition we have come so far from the bold kind of witness and the very direct call to commitment which marked the Protestant Christian movement for so long a time. It is unlikely that

³¹Hoge and Roozen, pp. 84-85.

many clergy enter the ministry in order to become organization personnel. But the fact is that as time goes by many come to see themselves in that role. Often they do not feel very comfortable about it, but are hard put to know any way to escape from that sort of definition.

Sweazey says,

What really rises and falls is the concern for evangelism in the church. The fault is not in our stars, but in ourselves. The Holy Spirit is always ready. When any group or person shows concern, that can be the signal that an up cycle is commencing. The cycle is not a cultural or historical phenomenon, it is in us. What we do can mark the start of a new springtime of the Spirit. In evangelism, the right time is always now.³²

Sweazey's work is a very serious study attempting to bring together the best resources of clergy leadership and of congregational support to make the call to commitment, involvement in new life in Christ, and participation in the church a really attractive alternative for people in a seeking society.

At this point we turn to the "church growth movement" to include several key sentences from McGavran:

Anyone who would comprehend the growth of Christian churches must see it primarily as faithfulness to God. Where there is no faithfulness in proclaiming Christ, there is no growth.³³

³²Sweazey, p. 37.

³³Donald A. McGavran, Understanding Church Growth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 15.

One of the images which Dr. McGavran uses in his book is thoroughly based on the biblical scriptures. He calls it "search theology" and indicates that scriptures are essentially the story of God's search for His human creation, finally taking fullest form in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. He further argues that if we are to use this same kind of imagery, this same kind of theology, we, too, are to search for God's creatures to win them to involvement in new life in Christ and His church. McGavran says,

Churchmen seeking to understand church growth do well to study the records of the men who were there--nationals and missionaries, and see whether their policies and incumbencies have anything to do with slow or rapid increase.³⁴

Later in his book he lists 12 reasons for growth. I lift out the one which is related to attitude and purpose, namely "some minister, layman or missionary dedicated his life to planting churches."³⁵ The extension of this would be that an existing church grows because some minister, layman or missionary dedicates his life to growing the church. Likewise under "Eleven reasons for lack of growth," McGavran says, "Leaders were chained to existent, nonproductive work,"³⁶ and he uses examples to describe how the church very easily and quickly becomes institutionalized; procedures become very ordinary and expected; and new life and new growth does not come until someone makes a breakthrough in vision

³⁴Ibid., p. 98.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., p. 141.

and in methodology.

McGavran describes the Mind-Set which settles in: "Remnant theology proves attractive. A glorification of littleness prevails in which to be small is to be holy. Slow growth is adjudged good growth."³⁷ All of which Dr. McGavran indicates is totally non-Biblical. His argument is that from the beginning the Christian movement was intended to be a fast-growing movement; that mass evangelism, large-scale commitment to the church, was taken as a matter of course, and it has only been in recent years that this has begun to be questioned both in theory and in practice.

Toward the close of his book, speaking to how one plans for church growth, he says,

We recall the great growth of the Methodist Church around the world. Wesley's class meetings did not arise by chance as he led a devout Christian life. He created them, standardized them, required new believers to form themselves into them. Wesley, Asbury, Coke and others would have laughed at any idea that church growth took place by itself without any planning.³⁸

One of the key passages in Dean Kelly's book strikes the same note as that struck by McGavran and other church-growth advocates when he says,

When a handful of wholly committed human beings give themselves fully to a great cause or faith, they are virtually irresistible. They are able to do this for several reasons: (1) they are willing to put in more time and effort for their cause than most people do for even their fondest personal ambitions, (2) they have

³⁷Ibid., p. 145. ³⁸Ibid., p. 358.

an assurance, a conviction of rightness, of being on the side of God that most people and most human endeavors cannot match, (3) they are linked together in a bond of mutually supportive, like-minded, equally devoted fellow believers who reinforce one another in times of weakness, persecution and doubt, and (4) they are willing to subordinate their personal desires and ambitions to the shared goals of the group.³⁹

Kelly feels that the conservative churches are growing for that reason, and the more liberal ones are not. What Kelly is calling for within the fellowship of the middle-road or liberal churches is that kind of conviction, motivation, and mutual support which has been found on the more conservative side of the theological spectrum.

³⁹Dean M. Kelly, Why Conservative Churches Are Growing (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 51.

CHAPTER VI

What have we learned from this research? This writer's hunch was that many pastors had lowered their priority for church growth and evangelism across the past 10-25 years. The response did not support this view. Rather, a majority felt they were equally or more concerned with this priority than in the past. At the same time, they saw other pastors exhibiting a lower priority of concern. It may be that there has been no intentional, conscious changing of priorities but that to many pastors it feels as if pastors and general church are not giving the time and effort they did in the past. It appears that church growth now rests more on individual efforts, rather than the church community as a whole.

One very strong signal coming from the pastors was that there needed to be seminary education for evangelism.

In addition, most pastors wanted to be evaluated for their whole ministries, rather than an evaluation giving church growth a high priority. Most pastors felt that the whole ministry of the church was what generated church growth, rather than a specific evangelistic theme.

The new factor that obtains at the present time is that, with the continuing decline in church membership, it appears that if the downward curve continues we will in short order be a church that is a "remnant church". If so,

then the place that has been occupied by churches like the United Methodist in the American society will no longer obtain, simply for lack of numbers. It seems imperative that if the church is to continue and to increase its influence in culture and to impact families and individuals with a Christian view of life, that it must turn the curve around and begin to grow. Which raises the question "Do we have a theology of church growth, and if so, what is it?"

The results of this study seem to indicate that among pastors there is a good biblical foundation for church growth; that most pastors see that it is integral within the New Testament message upon which their ministry is based, that evangelism to all human beings is expected from the Christian ministry and the Christian church. Few would propose that they are addressing church growth with the thought of personal advancement, or recognition from peers or hierarchy. This research has shown that most pastors feel that the reasons for evangelism to Christ and the church are because it will result in a more meaningful personal and family life for them and will improve the quality of community and culture. There seem to be hardly any pastors who see church growth as the unique responsibility of the pastor, and there seem to be a large number of them who feel that pastor and church must work together in a supportive way for church growth to take place. What

seems to be lacking is any well thought out plan that is used across the church and by pastors who have a variety of attitudes.

One of the real obstacles surfaced in this study is the negative feeling toward the images of evangelism used by the more conservative churches at present, and toward some of the evangelistic methods used by the United Methodist church in past years. It appears that nothing has really arisen as yet to take the place of these modes which have been discarded. A prevalent attitude seems to be that if the church does a good job at the business of worship, education, service and so on, then growth will take place. At the same time there is a recognition by a substantial percentage of ministers that even though these things are going well, church growth is not totally predictable. Much seems to depend upon the situation in which the local parish finds itself. There are, it appears to most ministers, some places where growth can take place with a given amount of effort, and others where with the same effort or more, hardly any growth will take place, and in fact a decline is almost absolutely certain.

Again, what seems to be needed is that the parish clergy see the cause of church growth as a priority they have chosen, rather than one imposed as a denominational emphasis or a Conference-wide program. There seems to be a

widespread distrust of both of these initiatives for church growth, that the program "handed down" from above just doesn't result in the loyalty and the involvement of the people who must make the program work. This may be the time when certain local United Methodist churches within the Conference need to lift up what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how they are doing it, as an example to share with other churches and with other pastors; to reproduce the kind of sharing that has been done by some of the more conservative churches who, on the basis of their success, have been willing to share their theologies and methodologies with others.

Even following such a plan, we may expect there to be real resistance to being instructed by others. However, it appears to me that this may be the only way which a significant number of United Methodist clergy will ever be reached. Some churches send their pastors, and some pastors have chosen on their own, to visit the church growth programs sponsored by the more conservative churches, and they have usually said they have learned something and it has made a positive difference in their approach to evangelism and church growth. At the same time, those reached through this approach have been relatively few. There has been no overt endorsement of church growth seminars sponsored by non-United Methodist organizations.

Therefore the issue essentially comes down to the question of whether United Methodist clergy wish their churches to grow, and whether they really wish for large-scale accessions of new members to their churches. It would mean more effort, more time, and more energy spent on this task. It would mean training and motivating large numbers of lay people. It might mean lowering the priorities on some other church concerns--though this is not necessarily to be taken for granted. The issue that is before the United Methodist church and before its clergy is simply, "does the church wish to grow, or does it wish to continue its steady decline in the years ahead?"

Looking to the New Testament, to the apostolic church, to the Protestant church fathers, and to the witness of contemporary church growth advocates, it is clear that growth, extension of the church, evangelism, is integral to the Christian movement. Those of other generations would not even consider the subject as one to be debated. Our position ought to be that the goal of church growth is to be taken for granted and every effort should be bent to winning people to Christ and His church.

It may be that every institution, after an initial growth experience, becomes entrenched, and that its leaders who were in former days missionaries and charismatic personalities tend to become functionaries and establishment

personnel. At the same time, if that institution is to continue, it must raise up in every generation leaders who are willing to carry the torch for growth and extension. There are signs of hope. Warren Hartman, writing to this concern in 1976, notes,

The minister is usually seen as the key to church growth. The minister's commitment to an emphasis on church outreach and growth is reflected in the various programs and activities of the church's ministry. The current groundswell of interest among clergy and laity in Christian education and evangelism and other programs to minister to large numbers of persons may be signalling a reordering of priorities which could have a positive effect on future church growth.⁴⁰

If we truly believe that God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn it, but to save it, then that message of good news is to be shared in every way possible, with integrity, to bring the good word of new life in Christ, of hope and courage and faithfulness, to this generation, as to every generation in the past, and every one in the future.

⁴⁰Hartman, p. 7.

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APPENDIX

Logic of the Questionnaire:

The research is aimed at discovering pastoral attitudes toward church growth and evangelism among a cross-section of United Methodist clergy in the Pacific and Southwest Annual Conference.

Section A relates to the "setting" for ministry, and length of service, as well as the setting in which the original call to ministry came.

Section B explores how respondents view their priority for church growth in relation to other pastoral responsibilities, and how and why these may have changed across 10-25 years. Also, an evaluation of whether specific situations condition this priority.

Section C explores feelings about denominational expectancies and the usefulness of beyond-the-local-church resources.

Section D asks about pastoral feelings toward church growth as a denominational goal, as a subject for seminary education, and as a criterion for pastoral effectiveness.

Section E moves into feelings about the reality of membership decline, and feelings about movements which make church growth a top priority.

Section F asks for feelings about the importance of pastoral leadership for church growth, whether pastors feel they are giving adequate time and effort to this cause,

whether they have changed their priority for evangelism across the years. From here the research moves toward evaluation of the difficulty of church growth as related to 10-25 years ago, and whether decline is related to a lower priority given church growth by pastors and people. A final objective question explores the theoretical bases for evangelism for the respondents. Then the questionnaire closes with an opportunity for editorial comment on the whole issue at hand.

Primary objectives of the research are to discover self-assessment of priority given church growth and evangelism, how and why this priority may have changed in the past 25 years, evaluation of denominational resources and expectancies, and ranking of reasons to work at church growth.

Responses by the 50 pastors who returned completed questionnaires are catalogued in Chapter IV.

Robert B. Fehlman
5540 Sandburg Avenue
San Diego, CA 92122

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Attitudinal Survey for Thesis on Church Growth

Friends:

I am conducting a research in connection with the development of a dissertation to be submitted as one of the requirements for the In-Service Doctor of Ministry degree at the School of Theology at Claremont. You are one of about 60 pastors across the U.S.A., of various ages and periods of service in ministry, who I am asking to respond to the enclosed questionnaire, to help with this research.

As you can see, the questionnaire asks for your feelings about your personal commitment to the priority of church growth. There are no right or wrong answers. What I am seeking to discover is where this priority lies for a cross-section of United Methodist pastors. In addition, I'm asking for some feelings on your part as to where the denomination has placed this priority in recent years.

The responses will be treated objectively; you may sign your response or not. There are places on the questionnaire for some extended comments if you'd like to share them. I'll appreciate your completion of the inquiry in whatever detail you choose.

Because of the intensive debate going on about the whys and wherefores of church growth, I believe this survey can help us assess where we are in this concern, and just possibly what we might do to resolve this issue.

Do let me have your response by March 15. A return envelope is enclosed.

Sincerely,


Robert B. Fehlman

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INTRODUCTORY:

For the purposes of this study, "church growth" is understood as intentional building up of church membership by all appropriate means.

Area A.

1. How many years have you served in the appointed ministry? _____
2. How many of those years have been served in
 - a. Rural parishes _____
 - b. Inner-city parishes _____
 - c. Urban parishes _____
 - d. Suburban parishes _____
3. Did your call to the ministry come in a church which was:

Strongly evangelical _____

More social action oriented _____

A balance of both of these _____

Area B.

1. How would you rank your concern for church growth among these priorities? (1 highest, 6 lowest)

Preaching and worship; _____ Small group work; _____

Counseling; _____ Community and social action; _____

Christian education; _____ Church growth. _____
2. How would you have ranked the church growth concern (for you):

10 years ago _____

25 years ago _____
3. Would you comment on why there might have been a change in these priorities.

4. Do you feel that church growth is a concern for specific situations, like new church development and/or expanding neighborhoods, and less in other situations?

Yes _____
 No _____
 Uncertain _____

Area C.

1. How much impact do you feel that denominational or Annual Conference emphases on church growth have on your ministry related to church growth?

Substantial _____
 Quite a bit _____
 Some _____
 Hardly any _____

2. How would you estimate the impact the enabling and equipping from denominational and/or Annual Conference sources has on your emphasis and ability in the church growth area?

Substantial _____
 Quite a bit _____
 Somewhat _____
 Hardly any _____

3. How do you feel hierarchical or Annual Conference goals and expectancies in the area of church growth influence your time and effort in this area?

Substantial _____
 Quite a bit _____
 Somewhat _____
 Hardly any _____

Area D.

1. Do you feel United Methodism should put more _____, the same _____, or less _____ emphasis on church growth?
2. Do you feel the area of church growth should _____ or should not _____ be a part of seminary education?

3. Do you feel the Cabinet of the Annual Conference should judge a pastor's ministry by his/her effectiveness in church growth?

Substantial _____
 Quite a bit _____
 Somewhat _____
 Hardly at all _____
 Other _____ (Comment) _____

4. Do you feel the local church should judge pastoral leadership by the criterion of church growth?

Substantial _____
 Quite a bit _____
 Somewhat _____
 Hardly at all _____

Area E.

1. Do you feel the present concern about loss of membership over the past decade in United Methodism is:

A top-priority concern _____
 One of equal importance with many others _____
 Not a leading priority _____

Any comment? _____

2. Do you feel we in the United Methodist church have something to learn from the Church Growth advocates of our time?

Yes _____
 No _____
 Uncertain _____

3. Do you feel church growth is something which comes if we do a good job at the other tasks of parish ministry?

Yes _____

No _____

Some relationship _____

Other _____ (Comment) _____

Area F.

1. Do you feel church growth is an area where strong pastoral leadership is particularly called for?

Yes _____

No _____

Other _____ (Comment) _____

2. Do you feel church growth deserves more of your time and effort than you now give to it?

Yes _____

No _____

3. Which direction do you feel the priority for church growth has taken in your ministry during your years of ministry?

Stayed about the same _____

Gained in importance _____

Lessened in importance _____

4. Do you feel it is less or more difficult to enlist persons for commitment to Christ and the church than--

(a) 10 years ago?

Less difficult _____

More difficult _____

About the same _____

(b) 25 years ago?

Less difficult _____

More difficult _____

About the same _____

5. Do you feel that the recent losses in United Methodist membership reflect a lesser priority given to church growth by pastors and people in recent years?

Yes _____

No _____

Other _____ (Comment) _____

6. Would you rank these reasons for church growth in your personal ministry? (1 ranks highest, 6 lowest)

Want a "successful ministry" _____

Feel the Gospel calls to evangelism everyone _____

Means eternal salvation for every believer
added _____

Makes for a better community _____

Results in better, happier personal and family
living _____

It's expected of me _____

7. Would you add here any feelings you have about the issue of church growth and the pastor's calling in regard to it, that may not have been addressed in the above questions:

ADDENDUM

Addendum: A Contemporary Model for
Church Growth and Evangelism

Herewith one model for the contemporary church to be about the business of church growth and evangelism. Within this model we incorporate a theology of the church's task in evangelism, a concern for individual and society, a recognition of the local church as the primary vehicle for evangelism, a plan for using the strengths of the local church, and a focus on the pastor as a primary instrument for challenging and training the congregation to be faithful and effective in its work in evangelism and growth.

In chapter one of this paper we surveyed the Biblical, historical, and contemporary foundations for evangelism and church growth. It is fundamental for the pastor and church to review these foundations frequently, to be reminded again and again of the command to share the gospel and to incorporate new life into the church. This can be done through sermons, through the liturgy, through the statements of purpose developed by boards and councils. When this is done on a regular basis, it is seen not as a passing fad or a program emphasis for a time, but as the very lifeblood of the church. The two emphases to be lifted regularly are faithfulness to the gospel's call to evangelize and disciple, and faithful concern for individuals in our world now.

This model suggests that concern for church growth and evangelism be kept "up front" for pastor and people. This would include a regular addressing of the question "How are we doing?" and "Where can we improve?" One practical way to bring this to life is for both old and new members to speak to boards, to fellowship groups, and to the worshipping congregation on the theme "What drew me to the church, and what the life of faith means for me." This helps individuals clarify their own spiritual journey and is a very moving inspiration to others who listen.

Again, in literature developed by the church, in public statements, in the pastor's guidance, there should be a clear affirmation that winning people to Christ and the church is a step in a process which aims to direct persons to Christian witness and work in the world. That is, the aim is not alone to build up the church, but also to infuse society with more people to serve the causes of love and justice and reconciliation. Persons are to be brought into the church to be energized by the vision of the new world coming, where God's will would be realized.

The research for this paper revealed a very strong pastoral antagonism to general church or Conference "programs of evangelism." In this model we recognize and affirm the local church as the primary tool for evangelism and growth. Christ becomes known through the word and

witness of a congregation on pilgrimage together. Based on these affirmations, we move toward the most effective use of congregational life.

A church modelled for evangelism will recognize that every part of its life and program is instrumental. For example, the church will aim to assist any newcomer to feel welcome and befriended. To accomplish this, the church will sensitize its members to look for new faces and to avoid any cliquishness which can put people off. More importantly the entire worship service will be an affirmation of the grace of God, the potential for joy in life, and the divine resources for living. In this mode, the liturgy and sermon remain in touch with the past, but focus on the moment and the future. The question to be answered in worship is not so much "What happened back then?" as it is "What's happening now, and how can a life of faith enable me to live more creatively today and tomorrow." One of the terrible mistakes of the church in our time has been to bore its people with answers to questions they're not asking, and paying homage to heroes long-gone instead of addressing the contemporary issues of loneliness, meaninglessness, and insecurity. The worship service is to be a place where new life in Christ is celebrated joyfully.

One of the pastor's key tasks is to see that every church group sees itself as part of the evangelistic team.

This would include study groups, fellowship groups, church school and youth groups, Scouts, pre-schools, service groups, and any organization which is open to new participants. The pastor and church leaders need to keep aware of who the new participants are, as well as encouraging every group to invite friends to share. These days offer unique opportunities for the church to reach families through youth ministries, for many families seem willing and happy to share in a church fellowship where their youth are happily involved.

If the church has a staff, it is incumbent on the senior pastor to lead staff members in sharing information and aid in following up on persons newly involved. A new child in a children's choir, brought by a church friend, means a family to be invited to share in worship, growth and service.

This model for evangelism would include a continuous training opportunity for committed Christians to learn the sensitive skills of listening, relating, and sharing with persons. There are too many serious Christians who do not yet possess such skills, but with some assistance could become very effective in embodying the caring, life-giving spirit we see so completely in Christ.

A church really concerned to grow will offer programs tailored to particular needs. These needs (opportunities) will be perceived by a regular attention to the

community in which the church lives. If the neighborhood has a high percentage of senior citizens, then the programs of the church must be aimed to meet particular needs of these folk which the church can provide. If the area has many young families, then offerings are called for in the areas of child nurture, parent effectiveness, marriage enrichment. Undergirding all such special programs, the church should make clear that they are offered to help persons realize their potential as spiritual beings, to know how to channel their feelings of doubt, insecurity, as well as the creative urges to grow and become more competent in the business of life.

A fundamental ingredient in the growing church is a pastor who has a constant love affair with God and God's people. The church is not likely to grow if the pastor sees his place as a job or a profession, but as a unique and blessed opportunity to help people meet, love, and rejoice in God. This pastor, a servant of God, will recognize that the mission field is where he is, not in some remote corner of the world. This pastor will recognize that in most churches he is provided a support group of men and women to help in the joy of evangelism and growth. Our ideal pastor will recognize that though the part he plays in preaching and prayer, in sacrament and in counseling, as in all he does, is but one part of the church at work in

evangelism. But he sees his role as one helping parishioners rehearse their parts in the divine drama of human redemption. As of old, God works through people, with all their faults and failures. The pastor reminds his people that they are the ones to whom God entrusts the mission of love in action.

Of course, there are many practical housekeeping chores to be attended to by the evangelism-centered church. It will identify and follow up with visits to visitors. It will refer members moving to other communities to pastor/churches in the receiving communities. It will encourage its members to "bring a friend to church" or to one of the smaller groups of the church. It will provide helpful printed materials to help new persons know the character and life of the church.

What we are calling for is not some previously unknown method or vehicle of evangelism, but rather a carefully thought out intention to use every person and group, every activity, as a way to help persons be attracted to and willingly enter the community of faith. And we affirm that the pastor must be at the center of this endeavor, not as a hero to be worshipped, but as a faithful minister of God who is burdened to share the new life in Christ, to help people enter the church where that new life is affirmed and explored, and to help those persons become servants of God in a chaotic world.